

# DawnKing

Janalyn Voigt

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**DawnKing**  
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## What People are Saying about DawnSinger

Janalyn Voigt is a fresh voice in the realm of fantasy. Her writing is crisp, her verbs muscular, and it's all wrapped up in a lyrical style. Blending action and romance, DawnSinger is a journey through fear, failure, and faith, and I look forward to its sequel. Eric Wilson, NY Times bestselling author of Valley of Bones and One Step Away

In DawnSinger, Janalyn Voigt has penned a novel full of surprises. With adventure, mystery, and an unlikely romance, this beautiful, epic fantasy debut will leave you scrambling for the next book in the trilogy. Jill Williamson, Christy Award-winning author of By Darkness Hid

DawnSinger is a delightful fantasy spun with bardic prose and threaded with danger and intrigue. Linda Windsor, author of Healer, Thief and Rebel, Brides of Alba Historical Trilogy

Janalyn Voigt builds an exciting world, tranquil on the surface but filled with danger, ancient enemies, and a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. DawnSinger leads you into a land only imagined in dreams. I can't wait to read the second book in the Tales of Faeraven trilogy. Lisa Grace, bestselling author of the Angel in the Shadows series.



# Part 1

## Treacherous Journey

### 1

#### WRONG TURN

“Easy now.” The wind buffeted Kai’s face as he leaned forward to put a hand on his winged horse’s shoulder. Battle cries, explosions, and screams littered the air. Repressing his own urge to bolt, he turned Flecht to meet the welke riders approaching from Torindan. Regret flooded him. Both he and his wingabeast would die. Torindan would fall this day, thrusting the once-united Kindren kingdoms into confusion.

Conquering the high hold of Faeraven would not appease Frearer’s blood lust. A stronghold could fall and be rebuilt, as Frearer himself had proven at Pilaer. Ah, but a heart, once silenced, would never beat again. While the Lof Shraen of Faeraven and the daughter he’d named his heir remained alive, Frearer would not rest.

Elcon and Mara had been among those who’d

escaped with him from Torindan. If he had anything to say in the matter, they would yet avoid capture. Surviving a clash with two of Frearer's finest seemed unlikely, but Kai could delay the assassins.

The giant raptor birds flapped their ragged wings and snapped the air with pointed beaks in a display of ferocity. Sunlight gleamed along their rider's swords, no doubt honed to wicked sharpness.

Kai's skin crawled. Garbed in the red of Frearer's elite assassins, the welke riders glared at him across the intervening distance, a space closing with alarming speed.

Kai touched the reins against his wingabeast's neck, all it took to tilt Flecht sideways and away. The wind snatched at Kai's breath, and he turned his face to breathe. Silver wings fanned around him and stroked downward. The wingabeast leveled in flight.

Bloodcurdling shrieks rent the air, the welkes' hunting cry.

Kai's heart raced, and he looked back. Both riders were following, one pulling ahead of the other. Flecht's course carried them above the forest that stretched across Elder lands to the sea. He guided Flecht lower, ready to duck beneath the tree canopy. Tiny, flitting birds darted through kaba leaves so thick they left no gap. If he tried to break through the screen of leaves and branches here, Flecht's feathers would shred. Only one choice remained.

He drew his sword and turned to meet the attack. The hiss of flight feathers reached him along with the stench of the assassin's sweat. Flecht shuddered but held. Metal grated against metal with jarring force. The assassin grunted and fell back.

His arm numbed by the blow, Kai retreated.



The second welke rider bore down on Kai.

With his good arm, Kai deflected the assassin's blows.

The welkes hovered abreast. The first assassin showed gapped teeth in a malevolent grin. "Want to fight, do you? Well then, Kindren, let's see what you're made of." The two circled him.

"What's that smell?" The first asked.

The second, smaller in stature, made an exaggerated sniffing sound. "Stinks like fear to me."

"You're not so brave." The gap-toothed smile mocked him again.

Ignoring the obvious ploy to break his concentration, Kai gritted his teeth and ran at the smaller of the two. The rider met his blow with stunning force. Kai fell back. The first rider set upon him at once. Kai shifted, but the blow caught his chest, the sword tip penetrating his surcoat and chain mail. Warmth ran down his side.

Shrilling, Flecht carried him backward.

The assassins took turns punishing Kai, allowing him no rest.

Flecht's sides heaved but bore Kai without balking. Kai faced his tormentors, panting like an old man. Neither he nor his wingabeast could go on like this. If the assassins took his life they might spare Flecht.

Kai bowed his head and waited for the end to come.

Riffling followed by a thump brought his head up. An arrow protruded from one of the welke's chests. Its gap-toothed rider widened his eyes. Shrieking, the raptor bird slipped from the sky.

An expression of terror spread across the smaller

rider's face. A bowstring sang somewhere below, and a second arrow planted itself in the remaining welke's chest. The raptor bird must have died on the instant, for it made no sound as it hurtled downward, carrying its screaming rider to his doom.

A wingabeast erupted into the air beside Kai.

Flecht shrilled and backed.

"Steady!" Kai called.

Aerlic, his bow slung behind him, perched on his silver wingabeast.

Kai gave him a nod. "I'm glad to see you."

"I can well imagine."

"Thank you for saving my life."

Aerlic nodded. "You shouldn't have tried to fight alone. Next time take me along."

Kai smiled at the flame-haired archer, the best shot among the guardians of Rivenn. "I'll bear that in mind."

"We should go." Aerlic gestured with his head. "Unless you want to take on more welke riders."

Kai followed the archer's gaze.

Above the pyres of smoke spiraling into the air behind Torindan's curtain wall rose a flock of welke riders.

"You're bleeding!"

Remembering the prick of pain from the assassin's sword tip, Kai looked down to the blood oozing through his surcoat. "I don't think it's much."

"We need to tend your wound."

"That's not exactly convenient right now."

"Your dying from blood loss would be less so."

Kai's lips twisted in a smile. "You have a point."

"There's a cave I know nearby where we can hide. Can you make it there?"

Weakness assailed Kai, but he had to continue. "Lead on."

The archer sent his wingabeast south and west, traveling low. Kai kept pace, forcing himself to remain upright in the saddle. They scaled the west side of a peak and slipped around to a ledge facing east. The wingabeasts touched down behind a screen of plume trees.

Kai held back a gasp while Aerlic helped him out of his surcoat and chain mail.

Examining the gash in Kai's side, Aerlic hissed in air. "That must be painful." Aerlic cleansed the wound with water from his drinking supply and rubbed ointment at its edges before binding it with bandages.

Kai pulled on his surcoat. "We should leave." He crept outside to look through the plume trees' white foliage.

Aerlic came up beside him. "I don't think that's a good idea."

Kai winced at the truth of this. Welke riders dotted the sky, clearly searching. "I hope the others hide well."



Alongside the crossroads before Mara, a weilo drooped its branches. The tree's curling leaves rustled as if whispering secrets, but she knew it for a trick of the wind. If only a tree could tell Rand and her which way led to Cobbleford. The main road bent back upon itself to run south and east, but a fork turned north in the direction they wanted to travel. Taking it meant fording the river near the remnant of a washed-out

bridge. Either that or they would have to fly across on the wingabeast, not a reassuring thought. Rand's lack of skill riding a winged horse nearly matched her own. After such a promising start, the path faded into thorny underbrush where blackened spars pointed skyward. A fire had once raged through here. The path reappeared at the mouth of a gloomy stand of keirken trees. "Why is there no sign to mark the paths?"

"Don't worry, Mara." Rand's smile bolstered her. "The way seems clear."

Mara's skin crawled at the thought of entering that tunnel of trees. All sorts of creatures could jump out at them from the heavy shadows. "I don't like the look of that forest."

Rand glanced into the distance. "I'll confess it seems unwelcoming, but you can't always choose your path."

"The main road might reverse itself and lead north."

His forehead creased. "I doubt that will happen."

"Are you certain?" Mara couldn't help but ask. "I think we should find out for sure before going the other way. That fork isn't well traveled. What if it's a dead end?"

"I'm certain that is the path we should take." He nodded as if that settled it.

Mara crossed her arms. "Taking it upon yourself to escort me to Cobbleford does not give you permission to make every choice for us both."

His gaze searched her face. "I'm sorry, Mara, but I know more about finding my way in the woods than you do."

She gritted her teeth. "Don't forget that I grew up at the White Feather Inn. While gathering wild foods

for our guests I learned my share of woodcraft."

"Why do you want to go the wrong way, then?"

"You can't know it's the wrong way for certain."

His jaw firmed. "Look, we're wasting time. Why don't we talk by the water? The wingabeast needs to drink."

Mara stuck out her chin. "I'd rather be alone right now."

"Lof Raena, may I remind you—"

"No you may not." She arched an eyebrow for emphasis. "I don't want to hear anything you have to tell the high princess of Faeraven." Tears clogged the back of her throat, and she turned her head to keep him from seeing them fall. A lof raena usually had a kingdom to serve, but hers had fallen and might never rise again. That mattered to her more than she'd realized.

He blew out a breath. "Will you see reason? I can't go off and leave you alone."

She stopped herself from reminding him that he'd done just that without hesitating when he'd abandoned her in the wilderness. Bringing up something he'd apologized for wouldn't be fair. Trusting him again would take time, and his trampling her emotions didn't help. On impulse, she pushed through the weilo's trailing branches into the shade beneath the tree. In its privacy, she dried her cheeks on her sleeve before pushing aside the screening leaves to look out at him. "I prefer to wait here."

Rand opened his mouth but shut it again. "Suit yourself." He stomped off toward the river, the wingabeast following him with graceful steps.

Mara let the leaves fall back into place. The green shade beneath the tree embraced her. A flaemling

landed on a branch above her and flicked its red feathers. The bird opened its throat and voiced an aching lament that resounded deep within her. Her father might be dead or dying. If he passed into the Land Beyond, her life would change forever. How could she disappoint the hope he'd placed in her? She would have to ascend to the high throne of Faeraven.

Mara peered out from the screen of leaves. The lonely road ran straight then disappeared around a bend. That it might curve back around the right direction seemed possible. Rand should be more reasonable. If he was wrong about the fork he wanted to follow, they would lose time retracing their footsteps. They really should make sure the main road didn't bend northward before taking that derelict track. She left her hiding place and stepped onto the road. Her feet made little sound as she hurried along. Fading sunlight slanted through the trees that lined the road, casting long shadows. She went around the bend and stopped, undecided. The road curved westward just ahead. If she didn't start back, Rand might return and find her gone. She didn't want to worry him, but how could she give up without going just a little farther? And yet...

Something felt wrong.

A grove of strongwoods lifted twisted branches against the deepening sky. The trees bordered a meadow thick with undergrowth. Anything could be hiding in there.

She should go back. Curiosity lured her onward. The bend wasn't far. She started forward, darting glances into the shadows. The sensation of someone watching crawled over her skin. Mara's steps slowed. She should persuade Rand to come back with her.

Movement flickered at the edge of her vision.

A grey wolf loped out of the underbrush and halted a small distance away. A black one joined the first, then another grey. Dying sunlight glossed the wolves' coats as they watched her with piercing gazes.

Mara turned to leave.

More wolves stood between her and escape. She darted glances behind her. The beasts ringed her about on every side. Tongues lolling and saliva dripping, they stalked closer.

Mara's mouth went dry. With shaking hands, she unsheathed the dagger from the belt at her waist. Its weight in her hand comforted her, but the blade wouldn't offer much help against so many. She picked up a rock at her feet and flung it at one of the wolves, her arm good from long practice. Da had taught her in childhood to fell birds for the pot with a well-aimed stone. The wolf yelped and bolted into the meadow. Mara threw a second rock. Another went running. A rangy white wolf, the largest of them all, fixed her with an unwavering stare.

Never taking her eyes from the beast, she reached for another rock.

The white wolf crouched, ready to spring.

Mara straightened slowly. She hauled back her arm.

The wolf sprang for her throat.



Rand cupped the back of his neck with his hand and drew a deep breath of the moist air flowing above the White Feather River. He didn't understand Mara's

stubborn insistence on traveling the opposite direction of her destination. She seemed to enjoy countering him. Either that or she felt reluctant to arrive at Cobbleford Castle. Could that be the trouble? Cast upon the wild lands after the fall of Torindan, she had little choice but to seek asylum with her grandfather. Rand could hope that her father would not die of the wounds his brother had inflicted on him. If he did, Rand's father would have assured the demise of the Alliance of Faeraven. The only thing that could stop that happening would be if Mara took her place as the new Lof Raelein, ruler of Faeraven. She would need to gather the scattered Kindren and call for help from the Elder nation. She could no more escape her duty than Rand could his father's wrath for keeping her alive to perform it.

The wingabeast waded into a shallow place up to its forelegs and lipped the water. Sunlight gilded the surface while blue and green lights gleamed in the currents, reflections of the sky and the weilos that leaned from the banks. Something boomed downstream, no doubt a log crashing against a boulder. He sampled the air and let out his breath in a sigh.

The way north did look rough, but the fact that neither Kindren nor Elder willingly entered the wild lands explained the road's neglect.

Rand squared his shoulders. He refused to let Mara stop him from delivering her into her grandfather's safekeeping.

He shouldn't have left her alone back there. The thought presented itself, impossible to ignore. He wouldn't have done it if she hadn't irked him, but he counted that no excuse. Irritation had clouded his



judgment. The woods held perils from which the dagger at her belt would not protect her. *Time to go.*

He whistled for the wingabeast. The graceful creature lifted its head and waded back to him, shedding water. Rand patted its arched neck and took up the reins. With a growing sense of urgency, he led the animal from the bank toward the weilo where he'd left Mara. A glance into the hiding place at the heart of the tree did not ease him. Light filtering through the screen of leaves revealed her absence. He peered down the road and caught sight of Mara hurrying along the road. Her strong mind left her vulnerable, as now. Protecting such a spirited woman wasn't easy, but for her sake and his own he must learn. He started after her.

Mara rounded the bend, never looking back, and moved out of sight. Rand ran to catch up but slowed as he approached the bend. He didn't want to startle her, although a fright might teach her not to wander off alone. Mara came into view, surrounded by wolves at the edge of a grove of keirkens. Rand halted in the road to gauge the situation. Before he could decide what to do, Mara hurtled a rock into the pack. It made a dull thud. A wolf yelped and fled. Mara fobbed a rock at a second wolf. The creature streaked away behind the first.

Rand pulled the knife from his boot and crept closer. Mara was doing well on her own, but she couldn't fend off so many.

She bent to pick up another rock.

A white wolf snarled and gathered for a leap.

Rand's heart thudded. He would never reach Mara in time. He hauled back his arm.

The white wolf leaped.

Rand hurled his knife.

Time slowed. The blade sang, joined by the whoosh of an arrow. Rand's blade embedded in the wolf's throat in the instant a feathered shaft penetrated it's side. The beast dropped to the forest floor, eyes staring.

Arrows pelted the pack. Several of the lanky creatures fell. The wolves scattered across the meadow.

Rand rushed to the white wolf and retrieved his blade from its throat.

The rock fell from Mara's grasp. She swayed on her feet.

Rand stepped between her and the grove. The arrows had come from above. He scanned the trees, weighted by shadow, although here and there golden light filtered through. In several of those places the leaves moved more than the light breeze would warrant.

"Who's there?" His challenge rang out. "Show yourself!"

"Says who?" a gruff voice asked. An arrow pierced the ground at Rand's feet. Laughter rang through the trees.

"Hold your fire!" A second voice thundered the command. The merriment died away.

Rand squinted, trying to see. "Whoever you are, thank you for protecting my companion from the wolves."

"Filthy beasts." The gruff voice spoke again.

"Why would such a tender maiden walk alone in these woods?" The leader called in a voice bearing the stamp of the southern kingdoms.

Rand pinpointed his location in one of the darker patches of shadow. "Only the maiden can answer that

question.”

“She will have that chance, but not in your presence.”

Rand tightened his grip on his knife. “I am her protector.”

“We have seen how well you perform that duty.” The leader retorted.

Heat rushed through Rand at the truth of this observation. He had let his emotions rule him and utterly failed Mara.

“My guardian and I must continue our journey without delay,” Mara spoke from behind Rand.

“I am not so certain of that, fair maiden.” The leader’s tone softened.

“We are on an errand of utmost importance!” Mara’s voice shook.

“Be careful what you say to strangers, Mara.” Rand warned her without turning his head.

“Do you silence her now? I have heard enough. Drop your blade and step away from the maid.”

The hilt of Rand’s knife pressed his palm. How could he do anything of the sort? He would die for Mara if the need arose. And yet...he could never hope to defeat them all. If he tried, Mara might be injured. Throwing his life away would do nothing to protect her, but as long as he remained alive, he might find a way to help her.

He laid his weapon on the ground and stepped away from Mara.

## 2

### THE OUTLAW LEADER

Mara wanted to weep at how quickly Rand moved away from her. When her father had commanded him to leave her alone, he had given up easily then too. And yet, what else could he do? She would not want him to die for her.

"Bind his hands," the leader snarled.

Several men dropped from the trees and thudded to the ground. Dressed in rough garb and wearing masks and hoods in the manner of outlaws, they surrounded Rand.

With her view cut off, Mara strained to see. "Don't harm him!"

"Will you defend him?" The leader's query wafted from the trees.

"Are you a coward to speak from hiding?" She provoked him. "Show yourself."

"You remind me of a maid I once knew. Her temper often bested her."

His voice seemed familiar, somehow. She scowled, trying to place it.

"But since you insist..." With a rustling of leaves he swung down, a dark figure hanging by a branch. He dropped and strode to her. A mask covered most of his face, and a cap covered his head. The leather jerkin of a hunter stretched across his broad shoulders. "Never let

it be said I denied a maiden's request."

"Who are you?" she asked, overcome by the sensation that she knew him.

"A man living out his days in the wild."

"Why do you conceal your face behind a mask?"

He flashed a smile. "Perhaps I do not wish to offend those forced to gaze upon it."

Most of the men left Rand and came to stand behind their leader. They had bound Rand's hands behind his back.

"What shall we do with him?" A burly man, one of several who remained beside Rand, asked in gruff tones.

"Blindfold him." The outlaw leader gestured with his head. "Take him to camp."

"Must we?" the burly man screwed up an eye. "I've an idea he's trouble."

"You're probably right, Trader, but he and I need to finish our talk." He circled Rand, looking him up and down. "Something tells me he's not who he seems."

Rand glared at the leader but said nothing.

Trader untied the strip of cloth that bound his sleeve at the cuff and knotted it around Rand's head.

Flanked by two of the band with one following and another before him, Rand disappeared into the darkness of the keirken grove.

"Where are you taking him?" Mara asked in sharp tones.

"Does it matter that much to you?" The leader spoke in the accent of the north.

"Your voice..." She trailed off, trying again to place him.

"Never mind me. I want to help you. Tell me, has